

Abstract of the Disclosure

The invention provides a technique to prevent confusion between part numbers used by different suppliers and manufacturers. The invention includes a database that (1) creates an association between part numbers that are directed to comparable parts, (2) generates a universal number for comparable parts, and (3) creates an association between the part numbers and the universal part. This set of associations is used to generate documents that include part numbers that the recipient of the document is familiar with. Limitations are placed on what authorities may provide information about a set of associations. Generally, only the supplier of a part or the supplier of a comparable part may create associations between their parts. This limitation helps maintain the integrity of information in the database. This database is coupled to a shared service network such as a hub for design collaboration or supply chain control.